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EUROPEAN STARLING SPREADING WESTWARD.

Although investigation has shown that the European starling, which is firmly established in the eastern part of the United States, is not so harmful as it is reputed to be in the Old World, many people look upon the bird as an undesirable alien. In a comprehensive report in 1921, the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture showed the economic value of the species, and makes available additional information about this bird in Department Circular 336, "Spread of the European Starling in North America," by May Thatcher Cooke, biological assistant. This publication traces the introduction of this species, its methods of spread, and the present extent of its range.

The permanent establishment of the starling in North America dates from 1890-91, when about 120 birds were released in Central Park, New York City. From this center the species has spread east to the Penobscot River, Maine, north to the Ottawa River, Canada, west to central Ohio, and south to Georgia and Alabama, though in the greater part of this territory it is still of only local or accidental occurrence. The successive advances made by the starling from the time of its establishment up to the present are shown by a map in this circular.

The starling is a prolific species, raising usually two broods of three to six young a year, and its rapid increase in numbers requires constant reaching out for new food supplies and nesting places. It seems to prefer the vicinity of water, and, at least in New England, is most abundant near the coast and in the lowlands of the river valleys. This preference has had a marked influence on the dispersal of the species. In its spread it has followed the coast and up the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers. Western New York was reached by the Hudson and Mohawk valleys and the lake region. The route to Philadelphia was probably via the Passaic, Raritan, and Millstone Rivers to the Delaware Valley.

The year 1916 saw the territory occupied by the starling greatly extended. The first specimen found west of the Allegheny Mountains was taken at West Lafayette, Ohio, in that year, and at least one pair nested about this time near Washington, D. C.

Marked extensions of range were noted in various succeeding years, and starlings have been reported from many localities beyond the farthest limits of the territory at present considered their breeding range. They have been seen within the past year at Athens and Thomasville, Ga., at Lake Jackson, Fla., and at Detroit, Ann Arbor, and Vicksburg, Mich. The westernmost records to date are Milwaukee, Wis., and the bank of the Mississippi near Baton Rouge, La. Many of the outlying occurrences are probably due to the habit which these birds have of gathering in large flocks and roosts after the breeding season. In these roosts, especially in marshes, they become associated with red-winged blackbirds and cowbirds, and when these migrate, some of the starlings apparently move on with them.

Throughout most of southern New England, southern New York, northern New Jersey, and eastern Pennsylvania, the starling is now very abundant, in some places outnumbering the English sparrow. The barrier of mountains having been crossed all the Central States will in time be occupied by the starling, but it will probably take many years for the bird to become of economic importance in that region. The northern limit of its range may already have been reached.

The undesirable qualities of the starling appear to arise from its choice of nesting sites, its proneness to drive native birds from the vicinity of houses, and the flocking habit. Its food habits are in some cases more beneficial than those of many of the birds it supplants. In places where feeding stands are maintained, starlings are liable to consume all the food provided for the other birds. The greatest danger from the starling seems to be from its habit of gathering into large flocks.

Copies of the circular may be obtained while the supply lasts by writing to the United States Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C.